

Literacies in Work Places: A Case Study

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Aims of this Presentation

- To describe some aspects of a research project and a programme of intervention on literacies in working places
- To discuss the principles that oriented the research and the intervention
- To discuss the possibilities of carrying educational programmes in working places

Structure and Tasks of the Project

■ **Research Team:**

Conception and Development of the Project

Licínio Lima; Rui V. Castro; M^a Lourdes Dionísio; Amélia Vitória Sancho; Paula Guimarães; Raquel Oliveira

■ **Co-ordination Team:**

Approval of the General Strategy and Assessment of the Reports

Research Team + Representatives of the administration + Representatives of the workers

■ **Educational Team:**

Intervention in the Working Context

Amélia Vitória Sancho; Paula Guimarães; Raquel Oliveira.

Research Team + Representatives of the administration + Representatives of the workers

■ **Duration:**

November 2002- June 2004

Literacies in a Working Place: Research and Development

Partners of the Project:

- Unit of Adult Education - University of Minho
- Multinational factory of electronic components (The Factory)

Aims of the Project:

- To characterise the Factory as a literacy context (material conditions and practices);
- To characterise literacy practices and attitudes inside and outside of the working place;
- To characterise the literacy levels of the workers in reading tasks;
- To promote meaningful literacy practices and attitudes concerning both the working place and other contexts.

Conceiving the Project

- 1. The point of view of the Factory Administration: “we think our workers have low literacy levels; we are a technologically advanced factory, so it is difficult to cope with that situation; we would like to know exactly what is going on at this respect”.
- 2. The point of view of the workers: “what is there about literacy? why is it important? what are you going to do with the data you want to collect?”
- 3. The point of view of the research team: “before deciding what to do, it is important to know what is going on; the research will have to do not only with some workers, but with everybody in the organisation and with the organisation itself”
- 4. Decisions after the negotiation: both the administration and representatives of the workers will be involved in the general co-ordination of the process; data provided are anonymous; data will consider situation - what are the literacy demands; what opportunities are there for literacy practices; what are the characteristics of the verbal texts existing in the organisation; data should be elicited taking into consideration what people know and do in the specific circumstances in which they act



Theoretical Principles (concerning Research)

David Barton, 1998; Mary Hamilton, 1998

- Literacies are situated in specific times and spaces, thus they are historically located; there is no such thing as a set of legitimate characteristics which apply in all the times and contexts;
- Literacy practices are intentional and they are embedded in wider social objectives and cultural practices;
- Different domains of life (private, public, educational, professional) give origin to different literacies;
- Literacies are means, not an end in themselves.

Theoretical Principles (concerning Education)

The New London Group, 2000

- **Situated Practice**, “embodied experiences of authentic and meaningful social practices”
- **Overt Instruction**, “forms of guidance” that focus “the subject’s attention on the important features of their experiences and activities”
- **Critical Framing**, “ways of coming to know where in the overall system you stand”
- **Transformed Practice**, instead of consuming people must produce and transform knowledge for their own social, cultural and political purposes

The Population: Some Features

- Mainly (married) women
- Low levels of formal education: 24,1%: ≤ 4 years of schooling; 27,8%: ≤ 6 years; 28,7%: ≤ 9 years
- Mainly (85,7%) working in the assembly line
- Weak participation in popular association; significant participation in unions;
- The majority participated in professional training in the Factory

The Factory as a Literacy Context and as a Formal Educational Context

- A large amount of verbal information around working areas: highly specialised (context dependent); strongly codified; not always useful; multimodal texts
- Assembly line: instructions and procedures; technical information
- A newspaper
- Professional training: not continuous, on a volunteer basis and oriented towards production; traditional methodologies (of a transmissive kind); textbooks
- Official Basic Education: residual, but successful

Literacy Practices I

- **Reading and Writing OUTSIDE the Factory**
 - ◆ People read various kind of texts, mainly with pragmatic purposes
 - ◆ Few writing practices
 - ◆ People (90%) recognise the relevance of reading and writing for life

Literacy Practices II

- **Reading and Writing INSIDE the Factory**
 - ◆ People report frequent and unproblematic practices of reading (worksheets, checklists, tables, digital documents)
 - ◆ Reading is used mainly to solve problems
 - ◆ People mainly agree (91%) that reading and writing are important in the Factory
 - ◆ Writing is not for everybody; it is socially distributed.

Reading Literacy: Levels of Attainment

The WHAT of Assessment:

Reading strategies (from word recognition to metacognitive processes) with different texts (fiction and non-fiction/pragmatic)

Reading Literacy: Levels of Attainment

The Data:

- i) Four groups of performance were identified;
- ii) Near 25% of the population showed extreme difficulties with written texts;
- iii) These difficulties concerned:
 - word order;
 - codified uses of language (sigla);
 - less functional reading tasks;
 - understanding of narratives;
- iv) These people were: mainly women, working at the assembly line, with low levels of schooling.

Designing New Directions for Education in the Factory

- A pilot experiment in the Factory: A “learning circle” aiming at a citizenship literacy
- The attempt to connect literacy education and professional training
- Conflicts: The contradiction between established practices and new pedagogies

Some Conclusions

- Life is the measure of literacy practices and attitudes
- The access to symbolic goods is asymmetric
- To know how to read and to write and to have the means to do that, these are the conditions to read and to write the world.
- It is not yet clear how this can be reached in a working place similar to The Factory